



## **Maroon Bells – Snowmass Wilderness Overnight Visitor Use Management Plan Final Decision**

### **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

#### **Q. What is the final Decision on the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness Overnight Visitor Use Management Plan?**

- A. The Deciding Official, Scott Fitzwilliams, has decided to implement Alternative 2, the proposed action, which adopts the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Overnight Visitor Use Management Plan (Plan) with one modification. This Plan sets comprehensive management direction for overnight visitation in the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness, located on the White River and Gunnison National Forests in Pitkin and Gunnison Counties. The Plan will be implemented in phases, beginning with a reservation system for a limited-entry overnight permit for Conundrum Hot Springs which is expected to be in place by summer season 2018.

#### **Q. What modifications were made to the Plan?**

- A. In response to concerns raised during the public comment periods, the Plan was modified to clarify the adaptive management strategy related to displacement of overnight visitors (Plan, page 37). The modification addresses expected displacement of overnight visitors and associated resource impacts when people seek camping opportunities in non-permitted zones directly adjacent to zones that have gone to a limited-entry overnight permit. When implementation of a limited entry overnight permit system in one zone is expected to displace overnight visitors to an adjacent travel corridor zone and cause negative resource impacts, a limited entry overnight permit system may also be implemented in the adjacent zone address potential resource impacts.

#### **Q. How will the Plan be implemented in a phased approach?**

- A. The Environmental Assessment revealed that five camping zones within the Plan have been exceeding the Groups At One Time (overnight use capacity) threshold over the last five years. Those zones are: Capitol Lake, Crater, Conundrum Hot Springs, Maroon, and Snowmass Lake. The Forest Service will implement management actions utilizing a variety of tools based on legal authorities, feasibility, technical logistics and Forest Service resources. Implementation of management actions for the above 5 zones and effected adjacent zones will be phased starting with Phase 1 which will occur in spring of 2018.

*Phase 1* (spring 2018) – Implement a reservation system for limited-entry overnight permits starting with Conundrum Hot Springs zone.

*Phase 2* – Implement a reservation system for limited entry overnight permits for the Four Pass Loop, which is comprised of the following zones; Crater, Maroon, Snowmass Lake.

*Phase 3* – Implement a reservation system for limited entry overnight permits for the Capital Lake.

#### **Q. Will the Plan implement an overnight permit system? Will there be a fee?**

- A. Yes, *Phase 1* of the Plan will be implemented in the spring of 2018 which includes a reservation system for a limited-entry overnight permit for Conundrum Hot Springs. After *Phase 1* is implemented, the Forest will implement *Phase 2* and *Phase 3* as capacity allows. A permit system could be applied in the future to other zones if and when they exceed their prescribed capacity. The approximate price for a reservation for one person through the Recreation.gov system is currently \$10. Fees are per reservation, not per night. Groups of up to 10 can be under a single reservation.



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### **Q. How do I obtain a permit to stay at Conundrum Hot Springs overnight?**

**A.** The Forest is still working out implementation details of a reservation system for a limited-entry overnight camping permit and more details will be available in early 2018. What we know now is the permit will be available on [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov) an interagency reservation service used by government agencies. Campers will need to obtain the permit prior to visiting Conundrum Springs. A permit will be needed year-round.

### **Q. How do I get more information?**

**A.** Details about how to obtain a permit for overnight camping at Conundrum Hot Springs will be available in early 2018. The Forest Service will outreach to the public, in coordination with partners, about the reservation system and permit guidelines and policies. Information will be available in early 2018 on the White River National Forest website: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/whiteriver> and [www.Recreation.gov](http://www.Recreation.gov).

### **Q. Does the \$10 cost of the permit go back to the Forest to pay for services like trail restoration and maintenance, campsite rehabilitation and Wilderness Rangers?**

**A.** No. The \$10 is a service fee that goes to Recreation.gov to pay for processing and administration of the website. The Forest will be looking into options for providing additional resources that could include a fee under the Federal Land Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA). A separate public process is required for new or increased Federal Land Recreation Enhancement Act fees. A fee under this Act would guarantee a funding stream to provide enhanced management needs at the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness into the future.

Full implementation of the Plan will require additional resources to help cover the higher costs for providing specialized services and management in the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness area that is currently not available. Resources are needed to protect the natural resources and environmentally sensitive areas. Enhanced management and specialized services include trail, campsite and area restoration and reclamation, resource protection, wilderness rangers, special wildlife protection measures, enhanced interpretive services, cleanup and removal of trash and human waste, volunteer programs, area-specific environmental monitoring and mitigation, special efforts to manage visitor use.

### **Q. Why do we need a Visitor Use Management Plan?**

**A.** The Plan sets management direction for overnight camping which will adaptively address increasing natural resource degradation within the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness. The Plan will enable managers to be flexible and assess specific areas within the Wilderness and address resource concerns with appropriate management actions. The Plan seeks to balance the preservation of natural conditions by addressing biophysical impacts resulting from overnight use, while continuing to provide opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities.

### **Q. Does the Plan apply to the whole Wilderness area or just specific areas?**

**A.** This Plan does not apply to other Wilderness areas on the White River National Forest or within Colorado. This Plan only applies to the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness in its entirety. However, within in the Plan, the Wilderness has been divided into zones based on visitor patterns and trends as well as landscape features. Some management actions may take place



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in some zones and not in others. Appropriate management actions are implemented based on capacity threshold indicators.

### **Q. Does the Plan apply to day-use of the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness?**

- A.** No. This Plan will only address overnight use of the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness. While this Plan does not specifically address or propose management direction for day use, monitoring data can be used to help inform future planning decisions and analysis related to day use social, physical and administrative issues and concerns that are not included in this Plan.

### **Q. How will the Forest Service enforce this plan?**

- A.** The Forest Service will work with wilderness rangers, volunteers and partner organizations to implement the Plan as well as Forest Service Law Enforcement, Forest Service Protection Officers. The forest will also continue to provide wilderness and environmental interpretation, education and visitor services regarding natural resource issues and stewardship ethics.

### **Q. What kind of degradation is happening in the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness?**

- A.** Within certain locations (Conundrum Hot Springs, Crater Lake and the 4 Pass Loop) and high use travel corridors, use has increased up to 285% from 2006 to 2015. Degradation to the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness physical resource includes disturbance of wildlife, habituated wildlife to human trash and campsites, illegal tree cutting coupled with fire scars, trash, human waste, campsite hardening and proliferation. Additionally, there are social impacts occurring on the landscape like impacts to opportunities for solitude, lack of Wilderness and camping ethics, crowding, noise and overcrowding in parking areas and increased need for emergency closures.

### **Q. How long has the Forest Service been monitoring the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness?**

- A.** Increasing visitor use within the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness has been documented as a management concern since the 1986 White River National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan and was addressed in the 2002 Land and Resource Management Plan revision. The Forest has been monitoring and collecting wilderness data for decades. Wilderness data has been obtained through campsite inventories, required overnight registrations, and through wilderness ranger patrol logs.

### **Q. What is and adaptive management Plan?**

- A.** The Plan is adaptive and defines desired conditions with indicators and threshold standards. When thresholds are exceeded for an indicator, management actions are triggered to achieve compliance. These triggered actions are phased in so that the least intensive intervention that achieves the desired conditions is utilized (minimum tool concept).

### **Q. What benefit would this plan provide to the recreational experience?**

- A.** The Plan gives managers the ability to address these biophysical concerns which will improve the biophysical environment (natural and undeveloped) and social qualities within the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness. This would enhance opportunities for high quality wilderness experiences for future visitors. Specifically the Plan would provide managers long-term tools to directly address crowding and resource degradation occurring on the landscape from overnight camping, including human waste, illegal fires, wildlife habituation and illegal camping.